



8 June 2006

**SAFETY ALERT:**  
**Alcohol, Drugs, and Owing the Edge**

1. Three months ago I implemented the Summer 2006 Lifesaving Campaign. One of the campaign goals was to combat alcohol- and drug-related deaths. Despite our best efforts, we have yet to succeed.
2. Our recent well-being survey confirms that alcohol and drug abuse continues to be a serious concern among those who responded. Soldiers who redeploy are especially at risk. Some Soldiers have become dependent on alcohol or prescribed medications and are unable to quit. Others crave the adrenalin rush associated with combat and try to duplicate that feeling by mixing alcohol and drugs. Others are using these substances as a sedative, to help them sleep, or simply to forget.
3. Over the past few weeks one Soldier has died and six Army officers have been charged with driving under the influence. The Soldier who died had recently redeployed and had been drinking alcohol until the early morning hours with some of his buddies. He lost consciousness and appears to have drowned in his own body fluids. Drugs may also have been a factor in this tragedy.
4. We have enough programs in place to help our Soldiers overcome problems associated with combat. What we need is for leaders, Soldiers, and civilians to live the Army Values by having the courage to intervene when they see someone in trouble. My last McKiernan Sends message discussed a concept called *Own the Edge*. Many of our comrades in arms are walking precariously along that edge and will go over it if we fail to take action.
5. Our ability to "own the edge" can be improved by becoming aware of the dangers associated with abusing alcohol and drugs. One way to learn about these dangers is by using the powerful tool developed by V Corps to address high-risk drinking and alcohol poisoning. This tool, which is available at <http://www.vcorps.army.mil/Safety/AlcoholPoisoningBrief%202006-03.ppt>, was created primarily for leaders and redeploying Soldiers; but all of us can benefit from the valuable information it provides. Even those who avoid alcohol and drugs can use this information to help recognize and help battle buddies who have problems. As you read the slides, you will see the same factors as those in the tragedy described in paragraph 3 above. The slides also describe high-risk behavior and how to intervene.
6. In addition to becoming aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse, I need you to do the following to take care of yourselves and those around you:
  - *Don't Walk By*. If you recognize that someone has a problem, take action, regardless of whether he or she is a battle buddy, family member, someone you supervise, or your leader.

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- Keep in mind that seeking assistance is a sign of strength, not weakness, and indicates your desire to ensure your own well-being and fitness for duty. The Army Substance Abuse Program can help, but you need to take the first step. Make the hard choice to get help for yourself.


- Acknowledge that these are stressful times, but remember that you are not alone. Social Work Services and other community mental-health resources are available to help those suffering from post-traumatic and other forms of stress.

- Understand that a buddy who helps you go over “the edge” is not a real buddy.

7. I ask you once again to consider the consequences of your actions and watch out for your battle buddies, family members, and friends. If you have a problem, using alcohol and drugs is not the solution. Take advantage of the programs available throughout the Army in Europe to get the help you need.



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